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Gender and Sports for Peace Promotion: The case of South Sudan

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Abstract

“Sport for Development and Peace” (SDP), through which sports are used to solve various social issues, has seen widespread implementation in recent years. Although the field has expanded since the mid-1990s and examples have emerged in practice, research, and policy, the development of “sport for peace” is still lagging behind “sport for development” in terms of both quantity and quality.

In the Republic of South Sudan in central Africa, conflict has occurred intermittently since independence in 2011, and as of 2021, about one-third of the total population was still displaced either at home or abroad. A lack of trust among ethnic groups and people is considered to be the main reason for the expansion and prolongation of the conflict, and the government of South Sudan has annually held the National Unity Day (NUD) since 2016 with the aim of “promoting peace through sports.” Youth from different ethnic groups and regions from across South Sudan participate in NUD and spend about a week together eating, sleeping, and chatting at the training camp site.

In recent years, there has been an effort to increase the number of female athletes through endeavors like the inclusion of women’s events. This study aims to clarify the role expected of women in the peacebuilding process and the contribution that sports can make to such processes, based on interviews with NUD organizers and officials. In 2021 and 2022, the plans for NUD were reshaped due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also changed the research plan. Keeping these limitations in mind, the purpose of this study is to clarify the purpose, significance, and challenges of peace promotion through sports, including the perspective of gender studies.

Key words: gender; peace promotion; South Sudan; sport for development and peace

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1. Introduction

Conflicts have been occurring intermittently in the Republic of South Sudan (hereinafter, “South Sudan”), located in central Africa, even after it achieved independence in 2011, and as of 2021, a decade later, about one-third of the total population had been displaced at home or abroad. As lack of trust between ethnic groups is considered to be the main cause of the protracted conflicts, the South Sudanese government has annually held National Unity Day (NUD) since 2016 to “promote peace through sports.” Youth of different ethnicities from all over South Sudan participate in the NUD tournament and spend about one week in the capital city Juba. In recent years, the aim has been to increase the number of participating female athletes, which has motivated the creation of women’s events and other new initiatives.

In this study, I will clarify the role expected of women in the peacebuilding process and the contributions of sports to peacebuilding, through interviews with NUD organizers and stakeholders. Owing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to change the timing of the survey, while NUD had to be held in a different format in 2021 and 2022. While taking these constraints into consideration, this study aims to clarify the purpose, significance, and issues of peace promotion through sports, and it includes the perspective of gender studies.

2. Peace Promotion, Gender, and Sports

2.1. Peace Promotion and Gender

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), large-scale armed clashes occurred in 17 areas in 2021: Cameroon (Ambazonia/north and southwest), Ethiopia (Tigray), Mali, Mozambique (north), Lake Chad (Boko Haram), Western Sahel, Central African Republic, Congo (east), Congo (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic), Somalia, Sudan (Darfur), South Sudan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Of these conflicts, 14 occurred on the African continent and were caused by reasons such as (1) arbitrary border setting in the past, (2) poverty, (3) tribal and ethnic conflicts and strained coexistence, (4) lack of good governance, and (5) disputes over scarce natural resource rights¹⁾.

Conflicts in recent years have reportedly been characterized by intensified attacks on civilians, especially more sexual violence against women and girls. It is estimated that 72 million children face serious risks of sexual violence in conflict (Milián et al. 2022, p. 7), and primarily, those who face such risks are women and girls. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Security Council Resolution 1325 regarding “Women, Peace, and Security²⁾.” The resolution specifies that UN member states engage with the following issues: (1) women’s participation (empowerment) in decision-making at all levels and in all processes, including conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconstruction; (2) maintaining and promoting peace, preventing conflict, and preventing sexual and gender-based violence

Table 1. Relationships between the action plan of JICA South Sudan and the Security Council Resolution 1325

Goal	Possible support	Potential initiatives
Participation: Ensuring women's equal participation at every level in all areas to realize gender mainstreaming in the peace and security fields.		
Goal 1: Women playing an active role in decision-making related to conflict prevention and recurrence prevention as well as incorporating consideration of women.	Supporting ministries and CSO, including the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare (MGCSW)	Supporting the planning and implementation of conflict prevention and recurrence prevention
Goal 3: Consideration of women reflected in decision-making related to humanitarian and reconstruction support. Allowing women to play active roles.	Support for all projects and elections	Women's participation in elections and decision-making for planning and formulation
Prevention: Encouraging women's participation and leadership roles in all processes and decision-making for conflict prevention, management, and resolution.		
Goal 1: Encouraging women's participation in conflict prevention and introducing perspectives of joint participation of both sexes in mechanisms for early warning and countermeasures.	Conflict prevention and peace education (all projects)	Consideration of women in statistics and analysis related to conflict prevention and women's participation in trust-building activities
Goal 2: Encouraging women's participation in conflict management in society under conflict conditions and allowing women to play active roles.	Conflict prevention and peace education (all projects)	Cultivating women's leadership in grassroots conflict prevention activities
Goal 3: Encouraging women's participation in conflict resolution, supporting women assuming leadership roles, and incorporating perspectives of joint participation of both sexes in reconciliation processes.	Training female leaders and conducting surveys and research	Leadership training as a part of support of women's groups, surveys, and research on cases of women in conflict resolution
Goal 4: Supporting initiatives to prevent conflict recurrence by incorporating perspectives of joint participation of both sexes.	Police training, legal reforms, community rebuilding projects, measures against human trafficking, and peace education curriculums	Support with consideration of women's participation and higher status
Goal 6: Encouraging reduced tensions between States, the building of friendly relations, and conflict resolution without the use of arms. Additionally, encouraging domestic activities by women, civil society, and NGOs to that end.	Supporting women's exchanges for peace, research activities, etc.	Supporting research and activities undertaken by the MGCSW and CSO

Protection: Ensuring that women, girls, and other diverse beneficiaries do not fall victim to gender-related violence or other human rights violations during and after conflict or in case of humanitarian crises, such as during a large-scale natural disaster		
Goal 1: Providing comprehensive support, including physical, medical, psychosocial, legal, and economic support, to victims of gender-related violence during a humanitarian crisis.	Victim support via NGOs	Economic empowerment projects that include psychosocial support
Goal 2: Reducing and preventing the risk of gender-related violence, etc., during a humanitarian crisis.	Victim support via NGOs and anti-violence movements	Economic and social empowerment projects and anti-violence programs
Goal 3: Incorporating the perspectives of joint participation of both sexes in the protection and support of refugees and internally displaced persons and preventing gender-related violence.	Refugee relief	Involving women in decision-making in job training projects at refugee camps
Goal 5: Supporting security sector reforms (SSR) that include disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and judicial systems during and after conflict.	DDR support, judicial support, and information campaigns	Considering discharged female soldiers, supporting GBV laws, and informing people working with judicial affairs

Source: JICA (2017), Republic of South Sudan Data Collection Survey on Gender Final Report

and human rights violations in conflict; (3) protection and relief for women and girls who have suffered gender-based violence in conflict; and (4) special consideration for women, children, and other vulnerable persons in relief and reconstruction (humanitarian and reconstruction assistance)³⁾. Nine related resolutions expressing concerns about the use of sexual violence as a weapon or tactic, the need for DDR⁴⁾ for female soldiers, and the importance of introducing gender perspectives on conflict prevention and mediation have since been adopted⁵⁾.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has commented that “gender considerations in conflict-affected areas help encourage the participation of vulnerable women in social recovery” (JICA 2016, p. 8⁶⁾). It has identified education, vocational training, income enhancement, non-formal education, life skills, land, and agriculture as focal areas, among others. For South Sudan, which is the subject of this study, actions have been proposed from the perspectives of participation, prevention, and protection, as shown in Table 1. They are consistent with the latest Security Council resolution on South Sudan⁶⁾ “to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, and inclusion of women, youth, faith groups, and civil society in all conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts” and the Japanese government’s emphasis on “a call for women’s equal and full participation in decision-making and as actors at all stages of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding, and governance, taking into consideration the differences between the sexes” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [MOFA] 2019, p. 2).

Table 2. Contributions of sports to the 3Rs

3R AFTER VIOLENCE	FEATURES	CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT
RESOLUTION Of the underlying, root conflict	HOLISTIC APPROACH, WIDE AND COMPREHENSIVE The time to start is always and the time to end is never.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships • Creating favourable condition for peaceful solution • Increasing possibilities of success through building relationship
RECONCILIATION Of the parties	CLOSURE+HEALING Establish reasonable working relations (TRUST AND JUSTICE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental and physical rehabilitation, trauma healing • Building relationships • Helping people to break the vicious circle of hate and revenge
RECONSTRUCTION After the violence	REHABILITATION Healing of trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing trauma and building relationships among "others" projects
	REBUILDING Physically repairing or making new building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Sport infrastructure
	RECOLTURATION introducing practical conflict knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge to approach youth involved in sport activities encouraging them to attend training about HR and conflict knowledge
	RESTRUCTURATION Democratization Eliminating social exclusion strengthening the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building relationship facilitating social inclusion

Source: Cited from Orsani (2009), p. 10

However, the consensus is that Security Council Resolution 1325 will not be easy to implement. Although all UN member states, not just Japan, were asked to develop an action plan, “progress has been slow, and in off-the-record discussions among peacebuilders, decision-makers, and those who support and shape the processes, there has been reluctance from many to allow women to participate, citing lack of evidence on the value of women’s participation and concerns about disruptions to the peace process because of their participation” (O’Reilly et al. 2015, p. 2). Yamada (2013) argues that “if we talk the essence of why women’s policies lag, we can see that the very systems favored by advanced countries inherently have an element of gender hierarchy that obstructs policies for women, and as a result, even if policies based on Security Council Resolution 1325 are implemented to encourage women’s participation in all fields, there will still be many issues” (Yamada 2013, p. 19).

In particular, we still have far to go in terms of the participation of women in peacebuilding. Gakiya (2016) speaks of the need for gradual change, saying, “People will be able to listen to women once they gain opportunities for the necessary capacity development and the ability to speak in their own new communities” and “Their experiences will be shared with the world, they will ultimately be more empowered, and the rifts that gave rise to war and extremism will be resolved” (Gakiya 2016, p. 50). The introduction of a gender perspective in field initiatives such as JICA’s individual projects will change the perceptions of society as a whole. Therefore, if we aim to reflect the opinions of diverse

people, the introduction of a gender perspective in development may be considered a key concept of peace promotion and the first step toward it.

2.2. *Peace Promotion through Sport*

Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) is a movement that utilizes sports for development and the realization of peace, and it has become increasingly active in the international community since the late 1990s. This paper focuses on “sports for peace,” which has prioritized activities in the field over policy. For example, the Open Fun Football Schools, based in the Balkans, is a long-established international NGO that started in Bosnia and Herzegovina and now works all over Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Moldova, and Georgia. It aims for ethnic reconciliation through soccer by organizing matches and tournaments jointly with local club teams, local governments, and NGOs as “activities in which anyone can participate, regardless of talent, gender, ethnic or social background, and religious or political affiliation.” Other organizations such as Football for Peace in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Israel and Moving the GoalPosts in Kenya are likewise engaged in peacebuilding in conflict or conflict-affected areas. However, “despite the growing number of studies on SDP, there is a lack of academic research that analyzes the interactions between sports and peace” (Cárdenas 2013, p. 27); thus, research on the interactions between sports and peace from the perspectives of peace studies and conflict resolution is limited, as are interventions and studies based on conflict resolution theory (Sugden and Haasner 2009). Among the few studies that do exist, Orsani (2009) argues that sports can be applied to the 3Rs proposed by Galtung (1998), namely, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution, as summarized in Table 2.

Research on the contributions of sports to each 3R stage is underway, but research on reconciliation, combined with the large number of projects in the field, yielded several publications in the 2000s (Kvalsund 2005; Hoglund and Sundberg 2008; Müller et al. 2008; Orsani 2009; Schulenkof 2010; Munro 2012). These studies analyze conflicts in different regions, but even with the differences in background and post-ceasefire circumstances, Cárdenas (2013) divides the levels of reconciliation expected of SDP into three stages: (1) reconciliation at the national level through symbols, (2) reconciliation through community activity, and (3) reconciliation through individual skill development. As an example of (1), the multicultural country of South Africa is widely described as a “rainbow nation” in sports contexts, and it has sought to create a national identity. As examples of (2), efforts have been made to help children and young people affected by conflicts participate and be integrated in communities through DDR, social integration, child soldier rehabilitation, and recreational activities in refugee camps. As an example of (3), many SDP projects try to teach life skills to individuals to foster community sentiments, empowerment, gender perspectives, and human rights awareness.

Although sports are expected to make these kinds of contributions, it is also necessary to consider the negative aspects of sports. First, there is the concern that sports are treated as a means of peacebuilding in isolation from other fields and interaction from other areas is too limited. It has been said that “sports projects need to be included in broader peace programs in the region” (Fleming 2015, p. 16). This

means that sports initiatives need to be a part of comprehensive approaches to peacebuilding, but this requires efforts to avoid interfering with or adversely affecting other programs. Moreover, even when sports are a part of the approach, “sports-based interventions are most effective when the organizations are working with local stakeholders and receiving support from grassroots activities” (Clarke et al. 2021, p. 11), so at the very least, activities need to be implemented in line with the local peace context.

Second, “sports-based projects can be counterproductive and aggravate the situation. Sports have the potential to be discriminatory and racist and to create intolerance and misunderstanding” (Orsani 2009, p. 17). In many cases, “sports leaders (coaches) have little or no knowledge of peacebuilding, while peacebuilding actors (researchers) have no training in coaching. They are unfamiliar with the characteristics of sports and do not analyze the connection between sports and peace or deepen their understanding of it” (Cárdenas 2013, p. 30). Almost all sports have some element of competition and attack, which tend to be unconditionally affirmed in the spirit of victory before all else. Sports undertaken in such a spirit “incorporate negative aspects such as violence, corruption, discrimination, riots, excessive nationalism, injustice, and drug dependence” (United Nations [UN] 2003, p. 2).

Concerns about the two negative aspects mentioned above stem from the imperialistic nature of modern sports brought into peacebuilding. Peace through external interventions, whether consciously or unconsciously, tends to gravitate toward the kind of “peace” desired by advanced countries, far removed from the local context. Some have expressed concern that the introduction of postcolonial sports incorporates a sense of duty at best and a sense of superiority at worst (Clarke and Salisbury 2017); thus, it is essential to remind ourselves of the negative characteristics of peacebuilding through sports.

3. Research Background

3.1. Overview of South Sudan, Foreign Relations, and Development Assistance

South Sudan, which gained independence from Sudan, has been experiencing intermittent conflicts since 1955. In 2005, the North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, proposing autonomy and distribution of oil resources. Furthermore, a 2011 referendum showed that 99% of the population supported independence, leading to the creation of Africa’s 54th country, the Republic of South Sudan. However, following rising political tensions within the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in July 2013, fighting commenced between President Kiir’s government forces and rebels supporting Vice President Machar in December. The conflict ended in August 2015, and a unified interim government was formed in April 2016.

However, conflict erupted again in July 2016 between the supporters of President Kiir and those of First Vice President Machar, becoming more violent than the conflict in 2013 and spreading throughout the country. The fighting engulfed the country in 2017, leading to a full civil war, but a permanent ceasefire was established with the adoption of the Khartoum Declaration in June 2018. With the final peace agreement signed in February 2020 and the inauguration of a new interim unified government,

the capital Juba has remained calm as of 2022. However, there are more than 3.7 million refugees in and outside of the country, and frequent attacks are perpetrated by armed groups in rural areas. Owing to the effects of the civil war that lasted nearly half a century, “there is almost no development in the entire country, which is about 1.7 times the size of Japan, with a critical lack of basic social services, such as health, education, and water supply, and basic infrastructure, such as electricity and roads” (JICA 2022). Consequently, many are forced to live in extreme poverty.

In 2006, JICA established a field office in the capital Juba to provide support in three areas: (1) new nation-building support (infrastructure development and strengthening of governance capacity), (2) better basic livelihood support, and (3) food security support. The Ground Self-Defense Force was dispatched in January 2012 to improve roads and other infrastructure around Juba, while also building camps for internally displaced persons, providing medical treatment, and supplying water during the 2013 clashes. A Japanese embassy was established in 2013, and Japan continues to offer various forms of support for South Sudan’s new nation-building endeavors.

3.2. *National Unity Day (NUD)*

In January 2016, South Sudan’s Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports⁷⁾ and JICA organized the first National Unity Day (NUD), a national sports tournament meant to promote peace by fostering unity and trust among citizens through sports. It has been held annually since then despite its format having to be adjusted during the intensification of conflict in 2017 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Hence, a total of seven tournaments had been held as of June 2022, with the cumulative number of participants exceeding 2,500.

NUD adjusted its schedule and scale in 2021 and 2022 owing to COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures, but prior to the pandemic it was held in several places, centering on the National Stadium in the capital Juba throughout January and February every year (Table 3). Young people selected from their states and regions would live with participants from other states for about a week, not only competing but also engaging in cultural activities, attending seminars, interacting in their free time, and making friends of other ethnicities. The aim was to foster trust in others and establish a foundation for peacebuilding.

3.3. *Survey Overview*

The survey was titled “South Sudan: Information Gathering on Women’s Sports and Peace Promotion” and conducted at the NUD Project Office in the South Sudanese capital Juba from August 29 to September 30, 2022. A total of 14 people, including government officials, project members, federation staff, and coaches with NUD connections, were surveyed, with each respondent visiting the office individually over a period of about one month. Structured individual interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted using a combination of English and Juba Arabic, the official language of South Sudan, while the results were written in English. I prepared the interview questions in English in advance. They were then translated into Juba Arabic as required during the actual interviews. All

Table 3. South Sudan National Unity Day statistics

	2016 16 th – 23 rd Jan	2017 28 th Jan – 5 th Feb	2018 27 th Jan – 4 th Feb	2019 26 th Jan – 3 rd Feb	2020 25 th Jan – 3 rd Feb	2021 MINI NUD in Juba and Wau	2022
Sports	Football - Male Athletics - Male & Female	Football - Male Athletics - Male & Female	Football - Male Athletics - Male & Female Volleyball - Female	Football - Male Athletics - Male & Female Volleyball - Female	Football - Male Athletics - Male & Female Volleyball - Female Wrestling	Football - Male Athletics - Male & Female Volleyball - Female & Male, Handball Male and Female, Basketball Male and Female	Football - Male Athletics - Male & Female Volleyball - Female
No. of athletes	Approx. 350	Approx. 500	310	334	368	Approx. 1300	372
Peace promotion	Cultural performances, awareness sessions on peace, HIV/AIDS, Gender, games, music, stories and drama, Peace Building, Awareness on Sexual reproductive health and creative peace message using pictures						
Participated by	9 Towns	12 Towns	12 Regions (inter-state teams)	12 Towns (inter-state team)	12 areas (10 states and two administrative areas)	Juba and Wau Cities	10 states and two administrative area (12 areas)
Supporters	JICA, UNMISS Japanese Contingent, Dai Nippon (Japanese construction company)	JICA, UNMISS Japanese Contingent	JICA, UNMISS, SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), AMS Clothing, Bollore Logistics	JICA, UNMISS, RCS, SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), UNDP, IOM, JIN Corporation, Bollore Logistics, Zain SS, GS for Construction, Universal Printers Company Limited	JICA, UNMISS, SDC, UNDP, RCS, JIN Corporation, Universal Printers Company Limited, M Gurus	JICA	JICA, UNMISS, SDC, UNDP, JIN Corporation, Universal Printers Company Limited, M Gurus

Source: South Sudan Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of data confidentiality at the start of the study.

The main questions covered (1) personal attributes (age, occupation, gender, ethnicity, educational background, work experience, monthly income, and sports history), (2) the current state of girls' and women's sports in South Sudan, (3) sports and peace promotion in South Sudan, (4) girls, women, and peace promotion in South Sudan, and (5) NUD outcomes and future improvement measures. For (1), we asked the questions after we had explained that they could refuse to respond since the answers required disclosing personal information. For (2), we asked about barriers and developments for girls and women in sports in South Sudan when compared with the sports situation for boys and men. Regarding (3), we asked about the pros and cons of sports as a means of peace promotion and asked them for anecdotes from the field. Regarding (4), we asked about the potential contributions of girls and women in the context of peace in South Sudan. For (5), we asked whether any social or individual changes had followed the seven NUD events held thus far and about their ideas on the effectiveness of NUD and future improvement measures. Finally, we asked them about their thoughts and opinions in general on sports, peace promotion, NUD, youth, and so on, telling them not to limit the scope to South Sudan.

4. Results

Of the 14 respondents, 4 were in their 20s, 3 were in their 30s, 5 were in their 40s, and 1 each was in their 50s and 60s. Seven were male, six were female, and one did not indicate gender. The highest educational attainment was high school for 2 and university for 12. In terms of ethnicity, 4 were Bari, 1 each was Gwolo, Logir, Lokoya, Lopit, Maban, Madi, Otuho, and Acholi, and 2 did not indicate their ethnicity.

South Sudan's Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports states in its Policy Framework and Strategic Plan (2015) that "gender analysis and gender democratization will be promoted in all programs undertaken by the Ministry" (MoCYS 2015, p. 35), specifically advocating (1) gender analysis and budgeting, (2) promotion of gender mainstreaming policies, and (3) implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. However, in its National Sports Development Strategy (2019–2024), the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) states that "Women's participation is to be prioritized in all sporting activities. Every school should prepare a sheet to record the gender and disabilities of students participating in sports. This is to provide basic information for planning to address practical sports needs and the participation of girls and children with disabilities" (MoGEI 2019, p. 5), thus clarifying that it is necessary to first gather information regarding sports for girls, women, and persons with disabilities. Therefore, in this study, I have listed some statements I heard that aligned with the MoCYS and MoGEI policies, with annotations included for some of them.

First, I heard the following about factors that hinder the participation of girls and women in sports.

Girls are considered better babysitters than boys at home, which prevents them from participating in sports. Girls are not allowed to participate in sports, as they must help their mother with household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, and washing for siblings, uncles, and old persons at home.

(Q, 30 years old, female)

Girls are offered fewer opportunities by their families. Parents provide more free time to boys and less to girls. It is because girls must stay at home and help their mother with cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Parents think that a girl who plays sports will not have time for home education, will be useless as a woman, and will not be able to marry a good man.

(F, 58 years old, female)

South Sudan has a social environment that opposes women's participation in sports. Men see women as a source of income and worry that their bridewealth will decrease if they start participating in sports. They believe that women who play sports will gain muscles like a man, so no man will marry her.

(L, 37 years old, male)

A couple of factors that hinder the participation of women in sports are the idea of domestic work as a role being inherent to girls and women and the institution of marriage based on common law. Women's families tend to marry their daughters into families that can afford the highest bridewealth (such as cows, cash, and jewelry gifted by the man to the woman for the marriage), which results in women often being overworked or subjected to domestic violence in their new home. "Tribal society in South Sudan is patriarchal, has strict gender norms, and has fixed roles for women. Decisions regarding marriage, ownership, and inheritance of assets are subject to common law and are often made in ways that are unfavorable to women" (JICA 2017, p. i); thus, there are many early marriages and pregnancies, which in modern times are regarded as problematic issues. In addition to women being regarded as property and a source of labor, some said that "there is a misconception that girls lose their virginity when they play sports" and "girls lose their virginity when they play sports or games, and they are then seen as spoiled." The spread of such unique superstitions based on a certain gender view, including the loss of virginity due to sports, is another factor that hinders women's participation in sports. Adding to these obstacles rooted in "customs," interviewees also pointed out issues related to "the environment."

Sports in South Sudan are thought to be for men, and this assumption leads to the largest gap in the [sporting] environment for men and women. Great efforts have been made to fund men's sporting activities based on this thinking.

(U, 49 years old, gender not indicated)

The majority of coaches/referees/decision-makers are men. Few women are involved in decision-making or assume leadership roles in any of the sports federations. There are few sponsors for women's sports, so sports are led by men.

(J, 24 years old, female)

Official women's soccer competitions have been held since 2020. Unlike men's soccer, not much effort has been put into women's soccer. Some regions have also traditionally banned girls from participating in soccer.

(M, 26 years old, male)

There are no spaces or venues for girls and women to play sports and games. The community is generally of the opinion that sports are only for boys.

(U, 29 years old, male)

It is not difficult to picture the major obstacles to girls' and women's participation in sports in terms of policy, budget, and institutions. Moreover, government officials, federation staff, and coaches are mainly men, which makes it difficult to handle day-to-day issues and lobby to secure the budget. In addition, girls and women who travel to sports venues, especially at night or in small groups, face challenges in terms of security, as they are at risk for becoming targets of sexual violence⁸⁾.

The statements provided above highlight the difficulties faced by women who wish to participate in sports, which are caused by multiple reasons related to customs and the social environment. However, these reasons can also be understood by dividing them into (1) economic factors (housework and marriage), (2) cultural factors (traditional norms and customs), and (3) social factors (opportunities and safety).

Noteworthy, I heard the following statements regarding women's participation in peacebuilding processes:

In South Sudan, women's voices are often heeded when they address peacebuilding issues. The role of women in peacebuilding is extremely important. This is because women can speak without fear and are almost never politicized.

(K, 49 years old, male)

Women can face any difficulties and have an affinity for peacebuilding. They feel that they "do not want anyone to die," which is a core idea of society.

(F, 58 years old, female)

Women have long been affected by conflict and will definitely build peace in the country. They also play the role of first educator for their children at home.

(P, 42 years old, male)

In South Sudan, women constitute almost 60% of the total population of all tribes in the country, so the difficult task of building peace should be undertaken by women. Women are the primary caretakers of the family, and it affects everyone when they are excluded from peacebuilding. Women are also protectors of peace who do not want anyone to die carelessly.

(U, 29 years old, male)

The girls and women in South Sudan whom I have met thus far had suffered a lot of pain, including through sexual violence, during the conflicts, and I felt strongly that they were weak and in need of protection, as they are bound by their families and not allowed to participate in sports. However, the narratives of many people painted an image of women as having “loud voices,” “unabashed voices,” and “influence,” also expressing high expectations for women as leaders of peace. In fact, there was an instance in South Sudan in which women in the Kiala district refused to live with men who had stolen cattle from another tribe, so after about a week, the men returned what they had taken. Similarly, women from two opposing tribes ended conflict by refusing to have sex with their partners until they achieved peace⁹). There have been several such reports about women contributing to peace. Moreover, during the peace negotiations with Sudan, “The female members of the SPLM (the current ruling party) convinced the others to appoint two women as leaders and to add them to the 10 delegates. Since then, several women have participated in the negotiations, but their ideas have not been adopted” (JICA 2016, p. 10). Thus, women’s participation is limited in political and policy-colored peacebuilding forums, including those for peace negotiations and designing institutions. Therefore, there is an urgent need to create mechanisms for “women’s voices” to be reflected in peacebuilding along a vector different from those for protecting women as vulnerable persons.

Next, the interviewees spoke about the contributions of sports to peace promotion.

Sport is a venue in which people show that they are from the same country, and it helps shape their identity as citizens. Sport is a means to facilitate interactions and build relationships between young people, coaches, managers, government officials, community leaders, and larger communities. It promotes peace, social cohesion, and unity among the people of South Sudan.

(J, 24 years old, female)

Sports bring people together. When fans come together to cheer for a team, they come not as members of a tribe but as fans of a particular team. The greatest feature of sports for peace promotion is unity.

(U, 49, gender not indicated)

At sports venues, people speak one language, regardless of tribe, faith, skin color, or background.

Sports also enable you to make friends with all kinds of people with different values. We were not allowed to be together (during the conflicts), but sports have been the only exception.

(G, 23 years old, female)

Nagatani (2022) examines the contributions of sports to peace promotion and states that it is important to consider the following two points: (1) how the sport activity for peace promotion affects persons at different levels, such as at the individual, community, and national level, and (2) what support was provided at which stages before, during, and immediately after conflict as well as during the reconstruction period (Nagatani 2022, p. 28). The above narratives cover point (1) and correspond to the three levels of reconciliation mentioned in Cárdenas (2013): (1) reconciliation at the national level through symbols, (2) reconciliation through community activity, and (3) reconciliation through individual skill development. This shows that NUD officials in South Sudan recognize that sports contribute to reconciliation at different stages. On the other hand, regarding point (2) discussed by Nagatani (2022), it is difficult to judge whether South Sudanese society is amid conflict or in a reconstruction period at this time, and as the circumstances differ depending on the region, it was difficult to determine that based on what the interviewees said. It was said about sport being used as a means to promote peace, “if it becomes overly competitive, it can lead to violence. Additionally, if some athletes are excluded, they too may become angry and disrupt the peacebuilding process¹⁰⁾.” Because of this, it is important to conduct complex investigations that include the negative impacts of sports on peace promotion.

5. Conclusion

NUD officials in South Sudan recognize the role that women play in peace promotion. Moreover, I have confirmed the contributions of sports to peacebuilding. Although not mentioned in the Results section, interviewees often spoke about increasing the number of events and participants as a future goal for NUD, and it became clear that diversity is required to ensure that peacebuilding through sports is effective. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said that “Sustaining peace will only be realized through committed, inclusive national ownership that considers the needs of the most marginalized, including women, young people, minorities, and people with disabilities¹¹⁾.” The core of the “peace” that the South Sudanese government wishes for is independence that includes diverse people, and attempts are being made to realize this goal through NUD.

Although this study focuses on peace promotion, gender, and sport, it examines narratives about 1) peace promotion and gender, and 2) peace promotion and sports, and did not touch upon the organic integration of the three. In the future, I would like to find new horizons in peace promotion, gender and sport by examining NUD and related activities conducted by the South Sudanese government.

Notes

- 1) Excerpt from the chairperson's summary report of the "International Symposium on the Roles of Sub-regional and Nongovernmental Organizations in Conflict Prevention and Peace Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa" organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the World Peace Research Institute in March 2000. https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/af_funso/gicho_s.html [09/09/2022]
- 2) For the context of UNSC Resolution 1325 in recent years, see the website of the Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters of the Cabinet Office: Azusa Ichiyanagi (2020), "Toward the 20th Anniversary of the Adoption of the 105th UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security." https://www.cao.go.jp/pko/pko_j/organization/researcher/atpkonow/article105.html [09/16/2022]
- 3) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019), Second Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2019–2022). <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/FILES/000459524.pdf> [09/13/2022]
- 4) DDR stands for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Re-integration. It refers to the series of processes through which a soldier is reintegrated into society.
- 5) United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, and 2493. UN Security Council website: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/resolutions> [09/13/2022]
- 6) UN Security Council Resolution 2636. UN Security Council website: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/370/61/PDF/N2237061.pdf> [09/20/2022]
- 7) When the first NUD was held, it was the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports (MoCYS).
- 8) In Juba, the capital of South Sudan, as of September 2022, the hours between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. are called rainbow time, and foreigners are asked to refrain from going outside during other times (evening, nighttime), suggesting the poor public security situation.
- 9) Reported in IPI Global Observatory, "War, Peace, and Women in South Sudan: Q&A with Betty Ogwaro." <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/04/south-sudan-ogwaro-kony-resolution-1325/> [09/21/2022]
- 10) L, 40 years old, male, from interviews with the Former Secretary General of the South Sudan Football Association.
- 11) Excerpt from a speech by UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the General Assembly's high-level meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace in April 2018. <https://www.un.org/press/messages/speeches/sg/28625/> [09/19/2022]

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